Constantius III

(8 February 421 – 2 September 421)

BRIEFING

Constantius III (died 2 September 421) was briefly Western Roman emperor in 421, having earned the throne through his capability as a general under Honorius. By 411 he had achieved the rank of *magister militum*, and in the same year he suppressed the revolt of the usurper Constantine III. Constantius went on to lead campaigns against various barbarian groups in Hispania and Gaul, recovering much of both for the Western Roman Empire. He married Honorius's sister Galla Placidia in 417, a sign of his ascendant status, and was proclaimed co-emperor by Honorius on 8 February 421. Constantius reigned for seven months before dying on 2 September 421.

LIFE

Constantius was born in Naissus, Moesia, (present-day Niš, Serbia) of Illyrian origin. Constantius served as a general under Honorius, rising to the rank of *Magister militum* (Master of the Soldiers) by 411.

In 411 Constantius was sent by Honorius to put down the revolt of Constantine III, who had declared himself emperor in Britain in 407. Constantius thereafter led his soldiers to Arles, the capital and residence of Constantine. Upon arriving, he defeated the army of Gerontius, a general who was rebelling against Constantine, before besieging the city.

Constantine refused to surrender, hoping to last until the return of his general Edobichus, who was raising troops in northern Gaul. When Edobichus did return to Arles, he was swiftly defeated by Constantius. Constantine soon after lost much of the remainder of his forces, as his army which had been guarding the Rhine chose to support the usurper Jovinus instead, forcing Constantine to surrender. Despite Constantius's assurances that Constantine would be able to safely retire to a clerical office, Constantius had him imprisoned, and further had him beheaded during his return to Ravenna, in either August or September 411. Honorius's remaining rivals were soon defeated, with Gerontius committing suicide in Hispania, and Jovinus being defeated by Athaulf, king of the Visigoths. Despite this, Honorius was unable to regain control of Britain, nor was any Roman after him.

The appointment of Constantius as commander-in-chief led to a war in 412 with the rival general Heraclianus, who, like Constantius, had done good services for Emperor Honorius. Heraclianus revolted, appointed himself emperor and stopped grain supplies to Italy. At the beginning of March 413, the usurper landed in Italy near Rome with an army to go to war against Honorius. He engaged in a battle with Constantius's Roman army, but was defeated. After his defeat, Heraclianus fled. He was captured and murdered.

WAR OF HERACLIANUS

The War of Heraclianus was a short military conflict in 412–413, between the imperial generals Heraclianus and Constantius III, in a period known for being very turbulent and violent. There were a large number of uprisings in the Western Roman Empire and various groups of barbarian tribes crossed the empire. The conflict between Heraclianus and Constantius can be seen as one of many links in the chain of events that set in motion the downfall of the Roman Empire. In the conflict, Constantius remained loyal to the emperor and Heraclian tried to become emperor of the empire himself.

Despite the historical significance of the events, few primary sources about the conflict itself have survived. What little is known comes from the descriptions of the contemporaries Orosius, Hydatius, Prosper of Aquitaine and Zosimus.

Constantius was commander-in-chief of the Western Roman emperor Honorius, Heraclianus a Roman general who governed the province of Africa as military governor. The two rivals both made careers in the Roman army after the fall of Stilicho in 408 and were on good terms with Emperor Honorius. Heraclianus was the one who received orders from Honorius to arrest Stilicho. In Constantius, Honorius saw the right person to lead his army. The appointment of Constantius as commander-in-chief led to an increasing quarrel that culminated in the final conflict in 412.

According to Orosius, Heraclianus was appointed the new military governor of the North African province in 409. Orosius states that his predecessor John was murdered. In another account, however, Zosimus states that Heraclianus was the successor of Bathanarius, brother-in-law of Stilicho, who was put to death by the emperor Honorius. With this appointment Heraclianus was rewarded for his good services.

Heraclianus supported the emperor when Priscus Attalus, with the help of the Visigoths of King Alaric I, revolted in Italy against Honorius, whose seat of power was in Ravenna, in 409. Attalus then established his own court in Rome. In this conflict, Heraclianus ensured that no ships with grain left the African ports for Rome to supply the city. By restricting the grain supply, Heraclian tried to starve Rome, causing the population to revolt against the usurper. Attalus then brought an army of Visigoths against Heraclianus, but this was not very successful. Honorius offered to share power with Attalus in 410, but he refused. Attalus was then deposed by Alaric after he refused to let him lead another campaign into Africa. As a reward for his good services, Heraclianus was appointed by Honorius in 412 for the consulship of the year 413. However, the actual appointment as consul never took place, because after Constantius was appointed commander-in-chief in 411, Heraclianus turned against the emperor. Confident of his own strength and urged by Sabinus, his son-in-law, he rebelled. He declared himself emperor.

Heraclianus's first act in the conflict was to stop grain deliveries to the city of Rome, as he had previously done successfully against the usurper Priscus Attalus. He did the same with the supplies to the Visigoths of Ataulf who stayed near Marseille in southern Gaul. His next move was to assemble a fleet to ferry troops to Italy for an invasion. In the capital Ravenna, Honorius responded to this threat by declaring Heraclianus and his supporters enemies of the state and sentencing them to death by edict on July 7, 412.

Heraclianus' behavior is difficult to explain, because until mid-412 there were no obvious signs of trouble in Africa. It has been argued that Heraclianus rebelled to avoid facing consequences for the crimes he committed against refugees. However, this is based on the testimony of Jerome, clearly exaggerated and of questionable reliability. Orosius claims that Heraclianus revolted because he felt he was in danger, but does not explain the precise nature of this danger However, East has made it plausible that the rise of Honorius' new Magister utriusque militia Constantius was the cause of this.

In March 413, Heraclianus landed in Italy near Rome with an army to go to war against Honorius. He marched north along the Via Flaminia where he engaged the Roman army commanded by General Marinus at Utriculum. Two versions have been submitted regarding the events that take place. According to Orosius and Marcellinus Comes, Heraclianus arrived in Italy and marched on Rome, but was shocked by the size of the army that Constantius brought against him. He abandoned his army and fled to Carthage, where he was captured and executed on March 7. In the second surviving version, written by Hydatius, Heraclian's army was defeated at Utriculum (perhaps Oriculum, in Umbria, halfway between Rome and Ravenna), in a battle with 50,000 dead. After his defeat, Heraclianus fled to Carthage, where he was put to death by envoys sent to him by Honorius. He was murdered in the temple of Memoria. Sabinus, Heraclianus' son-in-law, fled to the eastern court in Constantinople, but was later returned and subsequently exiled.

Later historians have concluded that the departure of the Visigoths to Gaul in 412 meant that Constantius had his hands free in Italy and could focus all his attention on Heraclianus. It enabled him to deploy all his forces when Heraclianus arrived in Italy in early March 413. Modern historians such as Wijnendaele, on the other hand, conclude that Constantius was absent with his field army and that Heraclianus was defeated by the Scholae Palatinae, the troops left behind to protect Emperor Honorius. This claim is supported by the tradition that Honorius' army was not commanded by Contantinus III, but was commanded by Marinus, the comes domesticorum, the most important general in Italy after the magisteri militum. It is not inconceivable that this elite army ambushed the numerically strong African army and was able to easily defeat it due to a tactical advantage.

Heraclianus' name does not appear in the Fasti consulares, the list of all Roman consuls, because Emperor Honorius withdrew his appointment when Heraclianus revolted. Flavius Lucius is the only one recorded as consul that year. Heraclianus' actions were hushed up and all his possessions, 2,000 pounds of gold and land of equal value, were seized after his death and given to Constantius.

Despite the victory of Constantius III, the conflict between imperial generals foreshadowed what would later cause the decline of the Roman Empire. The civil war helped weaken the Roman state, causing the political, military and economic system of the once glorious Roman empire to accelerate into a downward process that led to its collapse. The conflict between Constantius III and Heraclianus can therefore be seen as one of the many links in the chain of events that set in motion the downfall of the Roman Empire. The war in 413 was part of the downfall that marked a turning point in European history.

GOTHIC WAR IN SPAIN

Constantius initiated a campaign against the Visigoths in northern Hispania in 416, blockading them in order to starve them and force their submission. Soon after, the Visigoth king, Wallia, surrendered to Rome, agreeing to return Galla Placidia (the sister of Honorius, who had been captured by Alaric c. 412, and been forced into marriage with Athaulf, who was by this time dead), and to wage war against the Vandals and other barbarians who the Romans were still in conflict with, in exchange for food supplies. This development enabled Constantius to put an end to the Bagaudae revolt in northwestern Gaul in 417. He then continued his campaign against various tribal groups and regained control of much of Hispania and Gaul by 420.

The Gothic War in Spain was a military operation of the Visigoths commissioned by the West Roman Empire. This operation consisted of multiple campaigns that took place between 416 and 418 and were directed against the Vandals and the Alans to restore Roman power in the Spanish provinces of Betica, Lusitania and Cartaginense. As far as is known, the Roman field army was not involved in the battles, only foederati units fought on the side of the Romans. According to Thompson the Hasdingi in Gallaecia played a dubious role in this war.

The history of this war is briefly handed down, the main source is Hydatius (400-469), bishop of Chaves. Without his *Chronicles*, no history of Spain would have been known in the 5th century. Another contemporary is Orosius (375-420). Furthermore, Sidonius Apollinaris (430-486), the nameless Gallic Chronicle of 452, and Isidore of Seville (560-636) are useful sources. Also prominent historians such as E.A. Thompson and B.P. Bachrach have written the necessary about the period.

The broad outlines of the events are known. After three years of warfare, the Visigoths knocked down Romes' enemies in Spain and almost destroyed them. Fredebal, the king of the Silingen was captured and Attaces, the Alan king in Lusitania, was killed. Gunderic, the Vandal Hasdingi king in Gallaecia, was lucky, because they were not attacked by the Visigoths. Unfortunately, the reason for this has not been reported and the answer to it has been provided by later historians. According to Thompson, Gunderic was accepted by the emperor as an ally and it was his troops who dealt a heavy blow to the Alans in Carthaginensis. At that moment Constantius thought it was enough and intervened, he forced the Visigoths to stop their campaign and they had to leave Spain.

On 31 December 405/406, a coalition of barbaric peoples (Alanen,(Vandals: Hasdingi and Silingi) and Suebi) broke through the Roman border defense on the Rhine and invaded Gallia, which event is known as the Rhine Crossing. In their wake, a trail of destruction arose. Shortly thereafter, the rebellious British army under the leadership of Constantine III crossed the Channel. With a mixture of fighting and diplomacy, the British usurper stabilized the situation and established his control over Gaul and Hispania (modern Spain and Portugal). In addition, he had little to fear of the imperial field army that had been partly withdrawn because of the War of Radagaisus or went over to him.

Constantine managed to reach an agreement with the Alans and Vandals, which allowed him to establish his authority, while the Alans and Vandals in turn could secure their own interests. He also managed to persuade a part of the Alans led by King Goar to fight by his side. From those barbarians, Constantine created a regiment called the *Honorians*. which he gave as task to guard the mountain passes in the Pyrenees. In 409 Constantine's general Gerontius revolted against him in Spain and the Alans regiments were withdrawn from the Pyrenees, allowing the Alans and Vandals to enter the Iberian peninsula without problems.

In October 409, the Vandal, Alanian and Suevian tribes arrived in Spain, where they plunder. The Romans could do little to do with this. Most of Constantine's army units were in the province of Tarragona where they were deployed in the war against the rebellious general Gerontius.

The Spanish-Romans, like their fellow citizens in Gaul, seem to have made no effort to fight with the invaders; they rather joined the fortified cities, villages and castra in the hope that the Alans and the Vandals would move on. The intruders who were nomads in their neighborhood do not seem to have made any attempts to take the fortified places. The inhabitants, although they could only venture into the countryside with some risk, found the fields depleted of food. In some areas famine arose, contemporaries report that it was not uncommon for a mother to eat her own children.

In 411, Gerontius, taking his entire armed forces, left Spain to fight Constantine. The newcomers filled this power vacuum and decided to take possession of the land and divide it among themselves. The Alans were the most important group and owned the provinces Lusitania and Tarraconenses, the Vandal Silingi received Baetica, while the Vandal Hasdingi and the Suebi divided the smallest province Gallecia among themselves.

With the Spanish-Roman landowners, they concluded an arrangement for the distribution of the land based on hospitality, i.e. the Alans and other invaders became the guests of the Roman landowners and received a significant part of the income from their estates. In exchange for this income, guests 'protected' their hosts from robbers and looters. They also founded their own settlements. These arrangements seem to have brought peace to Spain temporarily.

Honorius' imperial army was at a distance in ItaIia, where it was bound after the war against Radagaisus to contain the Visigoths. After the fall of Rome in 410, they were in the south and were now on their way north. In addition, the army was to protect the Italian prefecture from the usurpators Constantine III, Jovinus and Heraclianus. Only after Constantius III, the commander-in-chief of Honorius' army, neutralized these threats and made peace with the Visigoths in 415, did the Romans gather the troops they could miss to be deployed the invaders. However, capacity for this remained limited, as the ongoing wars had halved the Roman army since 395.

The Western Roman Empire had been at war with the Visigoths since 410, albeit there were periods of cooperation. It simply had too few men to defeat the Visigoths, but on the contrary, the Visigothic soldiers were also indispensable in the defense of the empire against its enemies.

In 414, Athaulf, King of the Visigoths, married Galla Placidia, the daughter of Emperor Theodosius (379-395). After the conclusion of this marriage, relations with the Romans were again disrupted by Honorius' general Constantius (who would later become Emperor Constantius III), and who had proceeded to block the Mediterranean ports of Gaul. In response to this, Athaulf proclaimed Priscus Attalus as emperor in Bordeaux in 414. But Constantius' sea blockade was successful and in 415 Athaulf exchanged South-France for Northern-Spain. Attalus fled, fell into the hands of Constantius and was exiled to the island of Lipari.

Ataulf crossed the Pyrenees and installed his court in Barcino (present-day Barcelona) in the Tarraconence. Nevertheless, the arrival to Spain was peaceful, Athaulf did not met opposition. Not confirmed by source material, it seems that Athaulf and Constantius came to an agreement. The peaceful entry into Barcelona, as well as the arrest of Attalus, seem to reflect this, apparently based on the Visigoths' desire for peaceful coexistence with the Romans and that of the Roman Empire to use the power of the Goths to fight the other tribes that had migrated to the interior of Spain years earlier.

After dividing Spain among themselves, the Alans and Vandals hoped to receive the status of foederati from the Romans and addressed a request to Emperor Honorius. In exchange for peace, they offered to fight for the empire as allies, and to show their good will they were willing to give hostages. However, on the advice of his chief adviser, the commander-in-chief of the army Constantius, the emperor rejected this request, with the exception of the Hasdingi. Honorius chose to subjugate the barbarians in Spain, by applying divide and rule, he wanted to weaken them. To realize this plan, the Visigoths, with whom he had recently concluded a new peace treaty, were his main trump card.

In Spain, the Alans were divided into two main groups: a group led by Respendial was located in Cartaginensis and a group under the leadership of Attaces in Lusitania. The Vandals were also divided into two groups; in Silingi and Hasdingi, albeit with this difference that they had been known for much longer (from the 2nd century) as separate tribal associations. The Silings were located in the southern province of Baetica and the Hasdingi in northern Gallaecia.

In Honorius' attack plan to restore Roman authority in the Spanish provinces, the Hasdingi were given a special task to fulfill. He did not charge the reconquest of the province of Cartaginensis on the Visigoths but ordered the Hasdingi to do so. Even before the Visigoths took action, the Hasdingi under the leadership of king Gunderic went up against the Alans of Respendial and defeated them in a battle that presumably took place near the cities of Toletum and Consabura. The conquered had to place themselves under Gunderics' authority and leave Cartaginensis.

In the middle of the year 416, the Visigothic army left Barcino (Barcelona) and began its campaign against the Silingi. They harboured a special resentment against this people, because the Silingi had benefited from the food shortage among the Visigoths in previous years and had sold their wheat at exorbitant prices. It is unknown how big the army of the Visigoths was, but it will probably have been around 10,000. Except for Wallia, no names of the Roman command have been handed down, this could indicate that Wallia itself held the supreme command. The campaign led them along the coast towards the province of Baetica, which the Silingi had appropriated. The sources do not mention how the journey took, it is suspected that the Visigoths were transported by sea in ships of the Imperial Navy.

In the south of Baetica the Visigoths went ashore and soon attacked the Silingi. After a series of short battles that usually ended indecided Wallia managed to capture their king Fredebal by means of a list. A decisive battle between the two armies took place near 'western Calpe' (Carteia) where the Visigoths inflicted a destructive defeat to the Silingi. The surviving Silingis fled north with their families, where they sought refuge at the Hasdingi.

The next target of the Visigoths were the Alans of Attaces. The Visigoths advanced north and entered their territory. At Mérida the capital of Lusitania, they were met by the Alan army with King Attacus at the head. In the battle that took place near the city, the Alan army was defeated and their king was killed in the battle. Just like the other group of Alans and the Silingi had done, the survivors chose to flee to the territory of Hasdingi to join them, and without appointing a new leader.

The Goths only stopped fighting when they were ordered to do so by Constantius. His reasons for this have led to a lot of speculation. Most of these speculations have tried to explain Constantius' action by referring to the state of affairs in Gaul. In addition, many historians are dominated by the belief that the imperial authorities apparently had no objection to the presence of the barbarians as long as the Roman administrative structure was maintained, and the latter had now been met. The Goths had stripped Baetica and Lusitania of their Vandal and Alan inhabitants.

Now that the goal of the war was reached, after the defeat of the Alans in 418, Constantius ordered the Goths to stop the campaign and go to Gaul where they were given a settlement area in the province Aquitania. This meant that no war was waged against the barbarians who stayed in Gallaecia. The empire continued its alliance agreement with the Hasdingi, while the Suebi were finally also left alone.

When the "enemies" were subdued, Guntharic dominated all the remaining Vandals and Alans in Spain.

With this outcome of the war, the Roman Emperor Honorius had managed to recover his provinces disembedded in 407 and to restore the imperial government in them. For the year 420 there is evidence of the existence of a governor for Hispania and it again had its own field army. Nevertheless, the peace was short-lived, the Vandal king Gunderic already considered his military strength strong enough within two years after the war to expand his territory at the expense of the Suebi. In 421 his army left mountainous Gallaecia and moved south, where they captured Baetica and defeated the Roman field army.

REIGN

During this time period, generals played a critical role in ensuring the continued reign of Roman Emperors, especially Western Roman Emperors. Constantius's position of *magister militum* and his skill as a commander allowed him to gain huge influence over the Western Roman Empire, comparable to the earlier Stilicho. For this reason, Honorius bestowed many honors upon Constantius, such as appointing him consul three times: in 414, alongside Constans; in 417, alongside Honorius; and in 420, alongside Theodosius II. In order to further ensure Constantius's loyalty, Honorius arranged the betrothal of his sister, Galla Placidia, to Constantius in 417. Later, on 8 February 421, Honorius made Constantius co-Western Emperor under himself. However, his cousin Theodosius II, emperor of the Eastern Empire, did not recognize him as such. Reportedly, Constantius was angry about this and considered starting a campaign against Theodosius.

DEATH

In the end, none of that came to fruition, because Constantius' health deteriorated rapidly and he died after less than 7 months as emperor on 2 September 421. According to Syvänne, Constantius was killed by poisoning. As source, he cites Theophanes (AM 5913) who states that Constantius was murdered. Castinus, a confidant of Emperor Honorius, who after Constantius' death obtained the rank of commander-in-chief, is said to have had the hand in this. After his death, his wife fled with her children to Constantinople. Honorius only continued to reign until his death in 423, when Valentinian III, the minor son of Constantius, succeeded him, with Galla Placidia as regent.